

**Saint Paul Planning Commission  
City Hall Conference Center  
15 Kellogg Boulevard West**

**Minutes August 10, 2007**

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, August 10, 2007, at 8:00 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

**Commissioners Present:** Mmes. Donnelly-Cohen, Faricy, Lu, Morton, Wencil; and Messrs. Barrera, Commers, Gordon, Johnson, Kramer, Margulies, Nelson, and Rosemark.

**Commissioners Absent:** Mmes. \*McCall, \*Porter, \*Smitten; and Messrs. \*Alton, \*Bellus, \*Cudahy, \*Goodlow, and \*Spaulding.

\*Excused

**Also Present:** Larry Soderholm, Planning Administrator; Anne Hunt, Mayor's Office, Lucy Thompson, Allen Lovejoy, Patricia James, Shawntera Hardy, Andrew Jacobson, Jacob Rife, and Sonja Butler Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

**I. Approval of minutes July 27, 2007.**

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Nelson moved approval of the minutes of July 27, 2007. Commissioner Wencil seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

**II. Chair's Announcements**

Commissioner Donnelly-Cohen, who is the Commission's first vice chair, chaired the meeting. She had no announcements.

**III. Planning Administrator's Announcements**

Larry Soderholm reported on planning-related business at the City Council for last week and their agenda for next week. He also gave a mid-year review of the Commission's accomplishments in 2007 in comparison to the Commission's goals written in January; so far, the accomplishments are excellent—Central Corridor, Ford Site, task forces for the Comprehensive Plan chapters, etc. Mr. Soderholm thanked the members for their time and effort.

#### IV. Zoning Committee

##### OLD BUSINESS

#07-110-903 The Bridges of Saint Paul – Adopt resolution to memorialize decision made on July 27, 2007. (Lucy Thompson, 651/266-6578)

***MOTION: Commissioner Morton moved to adopt the resolution memorializing the Planning Commission's decision made on July 27, 2007, to recommend denial of the application for a PD zoning district. Commissioner Commers seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

#07-099-317 Midway Shopping Center – Variance of 164 parking spaces (1095 spaces required, 931 proposed). 1460 University Avenue W, SW corner at Snelling. (Sarah Zorn, 651/266-670)

***Commissioner Morton reported that the Zoning Committee has laid this case over to the August 16, 2007 meeting.***

#07-096-764 Midway Shopping Center – Site Plan Review for Walgreen's and Big Top Liquors. 1460 University Avenue W, SE corner at Snelling. (Tom Beach, 651/266-9086)

***Commissioner Morton reported that the Zoning Committee also laid this case over to the August 16, 2007 meeting.***

#07-099-246 Midway Shopping Center – Conditional Use Permit for a drive through sales and service. 1460 University Avenue W, SE corner at Snelling. (Sarah Zorn, 651/266-6570)

***The Planning Commission has laid this case over to the August 24, 2007 meeting.***

Holman Field Vegetation Plan – Planning Commission review of landscape plan per PC Resolution 07-30 and 07-31; not a public hearing.

***Commissioner Morton reported that the Zoning Committee has set a public hearing for this case on August 16, 2007.***

#### V. Comprehensive Planning Committee

University Avenue Central Corridor Planning Issues – An update.

Commissioner Donnelly-Cohen announced that the staff will present updates on several planning activities along University Avenue. First, Shawntera Hardy will describe the preliminary draft of the station area planning process and then she will explain the grant for a Bike/Walk Plan. She will be followed by Al Lovejoy, who will explain the Snelling-University Capacity Study.

Shawntera Hardy gave an update on what we are calling our Phase II activities for Central Corridor planning, following after the *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, which will be discussed at the next meeting of the Comprehensive Planning Committee. Also as part of Phase I, the City Council adopted interim overlay zoning on August 8, 2007. The adoption was complicated by some key Midway developments that are in process (Home Depot, Walgreen's and Big Top

Liquor) and were accommodated to a certain extent.

Station Area Plans. Ms. Hardy said the most important piece of Phase II is station area planning. We have a tight timeline because Met Council will be starting its station design process, which will involve placement of stations, whether stations will have uniform or individual designs, whether additional stations can be added, etc. Met Council will deal with the stations themselves; our station area plans will deal with the land use around the stations and the transportation connections to LRT. We will decide the types of land use and densities we want around each station and in between stations. We will plan for pedestrian and bicycle connections. We want to make sure that we plan for all modes of transportation. Staff proposes that the station area plans be done through a charrette process that is coordinated by a steering committee. The steering committee would have a Planning Commission member as a co-chair. Staff proposes that plans for each of the station areas be adopted as a part of the Comprehensive Plan. A resolution to initiate station planning will go to the Comprehensive Planning Committee on August 21, 2007.

Other Phase II planning. Ms. Hardy said that, in addition to station area planning, several other Phase II activities are underway or will start in the next few months. A Central Corridor Housing Plan Work Group has done a draft of recommendations and will be working on housing finance. There is a Citywide Parking Work Group that has focused on the parking oversupply at regional retail locations along the Central Corridor. Parking will also be considered at each station area. The interim zoning regulations have to be followed up by permanent TOD zoning within one year. A Business and Construction Mitigation Plan is being developed to strengthen existing businesses in the corridor before, during and after construction. The Invest Saint Paul Program has target areas along east end of the corridor. Also the Sustainable Saint Paul Program will be integrated into redevelopment opportunities along the Central Corridor.

Bike/Walk Plan. Ms. Hardy reported that the City received \$50,000 from the NTP Program to develop a Bike/Walk Plan. This plan will be done at the same time as station area planning. The plan will analyze bicycle connections--where trails and designated bike routes should go--as well as pedestrian routes to the LRT stations. There should be sidewalks and safe and pleasant walking routes. Near the stations there should be streetscape improvements. This planning proposal still has to go through MnDOT's approval process and an RFP process. A consultant will help the City with the plan and the plan is to be approved by August 2008 according to the terms of the grant.

Snelling-University Capacity Study. Planner Allen Lovejoy said that, unlike Ms. Hardy's presentation on current activities, he is going to be talking about a study that was completed about eight months ago. Public Works did a technical analysis of a range of alternatives for the Snelling-University intersection. It continues to be one of the more problematic intersections in the city in terms of congestion. Since the I-35W Bridge collapsed it has had increased traffic and is stop-and-go during the morning rush hour. This change will make it difficult to do further traffic analysis for the next couple of years until the bridge reopens and traffic patterns find their new normal levels.

The technical analysis of Snelling-University was a cooperative study among the County, MNDOT, the Regional Rail Authority and the City of Saint Paul. Snelling is a State highway; University Avenue is a County road. The City manages the traffic, controls signal timing for this intersection and along both of these arterial streets. The Rail Authority is interested in the implications for Light Rail Transit of any major improvements to this intersection.

The purpose of the analysis was to understand the safety and congestion issues. It was to look at a series of possible scenarios, but not to recommend definitive alternatives. We have some problems at the intersection and we expect that those problems are going to get worse. There is a tremendous amount of demand for regional north-south traffic on Snelling. It is not going away; we have known this since the late 1980's when we did the analysis on Ayd Mill Road. The numbers showed that there is continuous traffic north and southbound. A week and a half ago it averaged about 40,000 trips a day, which puts it among the busiest nonfreeway intersections in the metro area. We looked specifically at the details of University and Snelling and Snelling and Spruce Tree to get a sense of what physical fixes might be possible. These were the objectives: pedestrian and transit friendly environment, future redevelopment potential and capacity to accommodate future growth.

Mr. Lovejoy described some of the key findings of the study. Background traffic is the cause for congestion now and will continue to be so in the future. Although redevelopment and light rail transit will produce some changes, they will not significantly alleviate the rising amount of regional traffic using the intersection. About 40 percent of all traffic in the intersection is going straight through north-south on Snelling, and is not turning. LRT operations are not expected to be a major contributor to congestion; perhaps five to ten percent of the overall problem at the intersection will be due to LRT. Putting LRT in the air or a tunnel or diverting it around the intersection does not make a lot of sense. We want the LRT station as close to the intersection as possible, since we expect a lot of transfers between the Snelling Avenue bus and the LRT. The study looked at 17 difference scenarios and then focused down on three: 1) a one-way pair, 2) a ring route, and 3) grade separation. Mr. Lovejoy showed these scenarios on PowerPoint slides. All these alternatives need work, which can go hand in hand with the station area planning. That will give a broader context for any kind of future intersection improvements. Staff expects that the Snelling station area plan is going to take longer than the others. It needs to include the Rail Authority, Ramsey County Public Works and MNDOT.

Commissioner Donnelly-Cohen asked what funding has been designated for Central Corridor LRT studies now and if it may be reallocated to a bridge infrastructure program because of the I-35W bridge collapse. And similarly for future funding: will it be more difficult to get funding for LRT because it will be diverted toward bridges?

Mr. Lovejoy responded that money that has already been allocated for LRT should not be affected. The 250 million designated from the Federal government for replacement of the I-35W bridge is out of an emergency funding pot and it is an add-on to any federal funding that is in the pipeline for the State of Minnesota. It will not be debited against our normal allocation. What can we speculate about future funding at the Federal level? The president said he was not convinced that we have spent our transportation money strategically or effectively. More significantly, what is going to happen at the state level? The governor has committed to serious consideration of a gas tax increase. Gas taxes under the state constitution are solely dedicated to bridges and highways. It cannot be used for transit. Mr. Lovejoy said he has been asking folks at MnDOT and elected officials, what is the scope of the special session going to be? He gets various opinions (gas taxes dedicated to bridges only; reconsideration of the transportation financing bill that passed last spring; reconsideration of local government aid). Mr. Lovejoy said that he doesn't think anybody knows right now what the scope of the special session is going to be.

## **VI. Neighborhood and Current Planning Committee**

No meeting.

## **VII. Communications Committee**

The meeting scheduled for this morning was cancelled; it will be rescheduled in September.

## **VIII. Task Force Reports**

Commissioner Faricy announced that a major environmental firm out of Philadelphia has completed the Phase I environmental analysis of the Ford Plant. Even under the most optimistic timeline they will not begin the AUAR until November. This means there also will be delays with the Phase II planning. She said the environmental assessment for Ford may take longer than was originally planned and, moreover, the UAW is negotiating to keep the Saint Paul plant operating for an additional year or two. The City has hired legal counsel and a consultant to keep track of the Ford site environmental assessment and advise the City on its interest in moving forward with Ford and the MPCA on a clean-up plan. The state is also selecting five development projects in five cities as demonstration projects for best management practices for storm water management. The MPCA requested the City to submit a proposal for the Ford project.

## **IX. Old Business**

None

## **X New Business**

None

## **XI. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 9:51 a.m.

Recorded and prepared by  
Sonja Butler, Planning Commission Secretary  
Planning and Economic Development Department,  
City of Saint Paul

Respectfully submitted,

Approved \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

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Larry Soderholm, AICP  
Planning Administrator

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Marilyn Porter  
Secretary of the Planning Commission

PED\Butler\August 10, 2007